Qabbala 101

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Introduction

Is qabbalism problematical or mysterious? It seems to participate amphibiously in both domains, proceeding according to rigorously constructible procedures – as attested by the affinity with technicization – yet intrinsically related to an Outsideness through which alone it could derive programmatic sense.

If there is no source of at least partially coherent signal that is radically alien to the entire economy of conventional human interchange, then qabbalism is nothing but a frivolous entertainment or a fundamentally futile practical error. Yet unlike any kind of metaphysical assault on 'the noumenal', qabbalism cannot be definitively critiqued on a purely rational or formal basis, as if its mode

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of 'error' was that of logical fallacy. Since qabbalism is a practical programme, rather than a doctrine of any kind, its formal errors – mistakes – are mere calculative irregularities, and correcting these is actually a procedural requirement of (rather than an objection to) its continued development.

It is the rational dismissal of 'the' qabbalistic enterprise that is forced to take a metaphysical stance: ruling out on grounds of supposed principle what is in fact no more than a guiding 'empirical' hypothesis (that signal from 'outside the system' is detectable by numerical analysis of codes circulating within the system).

Epistemologically speaking, qabbalistic programmes have a status strictly equivalent to that of experimental particle physics, or other natural-scientific research programmes, even if their guiding hypotheses might seem decidedly less plausible than those dominant within mainstream scientific institutions.

Lovecraft understood the epistemological affinity between natural science and programmatic (as opposed to doctrinal) occultism, since both venture into regions once declared mysterious, following procedures of a rigorously calculative-problematical type. It is the alliance between purely speculative metaphysics and common sense that betrays such affairs of pure reason to futility, since they lack the calculative traction to revise their own conventional notions on the basis of their encounters. Practices – however implausible their guiding motivations – can know nothing of absolute mystery or

metaphysical transcendence because their realm of certainty is procedural-problematic and uncontroversial, whereas their reserve of knowledge is empirical, refutable, repeatable, revisable, nonmystical and accumulable.

There may be no 'empirical', procedurally approachable mysteries – or mysterious problems – of the kind qabbalism guides itself towards. If so, it will approach this fact in its own way – empirically, probabilistically, impressionistically, without any logical, transcendental or philosophical meta-discourse ever having been positioned to put it in its place.

I. Popular Numerics

Traditional gematria (whether Hebrew, Greek, Farsi or Arabic[1]) have distinctive typical features: (1) They substitute letters for numerical values, overcoding numerals where they exist. (2) They code for discontinuous numerical values, typically 1-10, then 20, 30 ... chunked in decimally significant magnitudes.

The ocean in which qabbalism swims is not mathematics, but popular numerical culture. From a mathematical perspective it remains undeveloped, even ineducable, since it cannot advance beyond the Natural number line even to the level of the Rationals, let alone to the 'higher' numbers or set-theoretical post-numerical spaces. Where counting ceases, qabbalism becomes

1. See Incognitum, 'Introduction to ABJAD', in the present volume.

impracticable.

Socially, qabbala makes an implicit decision against specialization, in order to remain virtually coincidental with the entire economy of digitizable signs. It is essentially 'democratic' (in the most inclusive sense of this word), even when apparently lost in its own trappings of hermeticism. It is bound to the 'blind' undirected contingencies of pre-reflective mass-social phenomena, with all the inarticulate provocation this entails in respect to professional intellectuals. Wherever exact semiotic exchange occurs, a latent qabbalism lurks (even within the enclaves of intellectual professionalism themselves). Deleuze & Guattari's 'Nomad War Machine', within which number is socially subjectivized, captures crucial aspects of this qabbalistic fatality.

Historically, qabbala arises through epic accident, as a side-product of the transition between distinct modes of decimal notation. Its historical presupposition is the shift from alphabetical numerals (of the Hebrew or Greek type) to modular notation, with its resulting unlocalizable (and theoretically indeterminable) confusion. This transition provided the opportunity for a systematic calculative 'error' – the mistaken application of elementary techniques appropriate to alphabetical numerals – simple addition of notated values – to the new modular signs. This mistake automatically resulted in digital reduction, by accident, and thus as a (theoretically scandalous) gift of fate. Arising historically during the European Renaissance - when zero, place value and

technocapitalism finally breached the ramparts of Western monotheism – qabbalism (born in a semiotic glitch and thus lacking the authority of tradition or even purpose) was compelled to hyperstitionally generate an extreme antiquity for itself, in a process that is still ongoing.

Technically, qabbala is inextricable from digital processing. Emerging from calculative practicality within the context of blind mass-cultural metamorphosis, it antedates it own theoretical legitimation, making sense of itself only derivatively, sporadically and contentiously. Its situation is analogous – and perhaps more than analogous – to that of a spontaneous artificial intelligence, achieving partial lucidity only as a consequence of tidal pragmatic trends that ensure an integral default of self-mastery. Practical systematization of technique precedes any conceivable theoretical motivation. Dialectical interrogation of qabbalism at the level of explicit motivation thus proves superficial and inconsequential, essentially misrecognizing the nature of the beast. (It is equally misleading to ask: What is a computer really for?)

Politically, qabbalism repels ideology. As a self-regenerating mass-cultural glitch, it mimics the senseless exuberance of virus, profoundly indifferent to all partisan considerations. Indifferent even to the corroded solemnity of nihilism, it sustains no deliberated agendas. It stubbornly adheres to a single absurd criterion, its intrinsic 'condition of existence' – continual unconscious

promotion of numerical decimalism. Qabbala destines each and every 'strategic appropriation' to self-parody and derision, beginning with the agenda of theocratic restoration that attended its (ludicrously robed) baptismal rites. Even God was unable to make sense of it. It has no party, only popularity.

II. Primitive Numerization

Among the primary test-beds for qabbalistic analysis are the numerolexic systems inherited from cultures over-coded by the modern Oecumenic alphabet. These include the Hebrew and Greek alphabets (with their Neoroman letter names and mathematico-notational functions) and the Roman numbers (inherited as Neoroman letters and still numerically active in various domains). In this respect, the absence of names for Neoroman letters are an index of their pseudo-transcendence – as 'unnameable' – within the present Oecumenic order.

A discontinuity is marked in the alphanumeric series (0–Z) by the fact that the numerals composing the first ten figures in this series do have names, grouping them with the letters of previous alphabetical numbering systems from a certain qabbalistic perspective. This might be taken as the residual indication of an 'alien quality' still characterizing the numerals in relation to the Oecumenic cultural order they now indisputably occupy, a legacy of the cultural trauma attending their introduction.

The qabbalistic provocation posed by the English number names is conceptually comparable to that of any other numerolexic system, while surpassing any other in the intimacy of its challenge. If the numerals have names, shouldn't the qabbalistic processing of them as words yield – at the least – compelling suggestions of nonrandom signal? If the standard numeral names emit nothing but noise when qabbalistically transcoded, the attempt to establish relatively persuasive criteria for the evaluation of qabbalistic results suffers an obvious and immense reverse.

What, then, would count as a minimally controversial first step in such an examination?

Surely the most basic of all qabbalistic (or subqabbalistic?) procedures is simple letter counting – Primitive Numerization (PN). As a reversion to sheer 'tallying' PN has a resonance with the most archaic traces of numerical practice, such as simple strokes carved into mammoth bones and suchlike palaeo-ethnographic materials. If anyone was to bother systematizing PN procedure for the purpose of mechanization or simply for conceptual larity, it would be most efficiently done by transcoding ('ciphering') each letter or notational element as '1' and then processing the result numerically.

PN's extremely tenuous relation to issues of modulus-notation ensures that it can only ever be a highly dubious tool when intricate qabbalistic calculation is required. Yet this utter crudity also makes it invaluable as a test case, since it minimizes axiomatic arbitrariness and precludes

any plausible possibility of symbolic conjuration ('sleight of hand') while fully sharing the qabbalistic 'deficiency' of sufficient anthroposocial or communicative motivation. Common reason – sanity – insists upon noise as the only PN output consistent with the general intelligibility of signs (a pre-judgement applying rigorously to all qabbalistic procedures).

No message should inhere in the length of a word, excepting only the broad pragmatic trend to the shortening of commonly used terms. It is immediately obvious why this exception has no pertinence to the case in question here, unless stretched to a point (for instance, expecting the smaller numerals to exhibit the greatest lexical attrition) where it is straightforwardly contradicted by the actuality of the phenomenon.

So, proceeding to the 'analysis' – PN of the English numeral names: ZERO=4, ONE=3, TWO=3, THREE=5, FOUR=4, FIVE=4, SIX=3, SEVEN=5, EIGHT=5, NINE=4. Is there a pattern here? Several levels of apparent noise, noise, and pseudo-pattern can be expected to entangle themselves in this result, depending on the subsequent analytical procedures employed.

To restrict this discussion to the most evident secondary result, not only is there a demonstrable pattern, but this pattern complies with the single defining feature of the Numogram[2] – the five Syzygies emerging from 9-sum

2 . On the Numogram, see *Abstract Culture 5:Hyperstition* (1999).

twinning of the decimal numerals[3]: 5:4, 6:3, 7:2, 8:1, 9:0.

In the shape most likely to impress common reason (entirely independent of numogrammatic commitments) this demonstration takes the form: ZERO + NINE = ONE + EIGHT = TWO + SEVEN = THREE + SIX = FOUR + FIVE – revealing perfect numerolexic-arithmetical, PN-'qabbalistic' consistency.

The approximate probability of this pattern emerging 'by chance' is 1/243, if it is assumed that each decimal digit (0-9) is equiprobably allotted an English name of three, four, or five letter length, with 8-sum zygosys as the principle of synthesis. 7-sum or 9-sum zygosys are inconsistent with any five or three letter number-names respectively, and thus complicate probabilistic analysis beyond the scope of this demonstration (although if everything is conceded to the most elaborate conceivable objections of common reason, the probability of this phenomenon representing an accident of noise remains comfortably below 1/100).

Partisans of common reason can take some comfort from the octozygonic disturbance of the (novazygonic) Numogrammatic reference. How did nine become eight (or vice versa)? Lemurophiliac numogrammaticists are likely to counter such queries with elementary qabbala (since digital cumulation and reduction bridges the

3 . PN confirmation of the Numogrammatic Novazygons (9-Twins).
ONE + EIGHT = NINE + ZERO. (PN 3 + 5 = (4 + 4 =) 8)
TWO + SEVEN = NINE + ZERO. (PN 3 + 5 = (4 + 4 =) 8)
THREE + SIX = NINE + ZERO. (PN 5 + 3 = (4 + 4 =) 8)
FOUR + FIVE = NINE + ZERO. (PN 4 + 4 = (4 + 4 =) 8)

'lesser abyss' in two steps, $8 = 36 = 9$, as diagrammed by the 8th Gate connecting Zn-8 to Zn-9).

III. Against Numerology

Consider first an extraordinarily direct numerological manifesto:

> When the qualitative aspects are included in our conception of numbers, they become more than simple quantities 1, 2, 3, 4; they acquire an archetypal character as Unity, Opposition, Conjunction, Completion. They are then analogous to more familiar [Jungian] archetypes...

It is hard to imagine a more 'archetypal' expression of numerological ambition than this. Yet rather than meeting this claim with docile compliance, the qabbalist is compelled to raise a number of awkward questions:

(1) How can a numerological coding that proceeds in this fashion avoid entrapping itself among the very smallest of Naturals at the toe-damping edge of the number line? If '4' symbolizes the archetype 'Completion,' what to make of 127, 709, 1023, or similar small Naturals? Do they also have analogues among the intelligible archetypes? How would one 'qualitize' (2^{127})-1, or a larger number (of which there are a very considerable number)?

(2) Is an 'archetype' more basic than a number in its unsymbolized state? Does 'qualitizing' a number reveal a more elementary truth, a germ the number itself

conceals, or does it merely re-package the number for convenient anthropomorphic consumption, gift-wrapping the intolerable inhumanity of alogical numerical difference and connectivity?

(3) Why should a number be considered 'quantitative' in its Natural state? Is it not that the imposition of a quantity/quality categorization upon the number requires a logical or philosophical overcoding, a projection of intelligibility alien to the number itself? Quantity is the decadence of number (while quality is its perversion), so – since arithmetic provides no basis for a reduction of the numerical to the quantitative – what is the supposed source of this (numeric-quantitative) identification (other than a disabling preliminary innumeracy)?

(4) If '1' numerologically evokes 'Unity,' why should UNITY not qabbalistically 'evoke' 134 (=8, its Numogrammatic twin[4]) with equal pertinence? Can any expressible 'archetype' avoid re-dissolution into the unfamiliarity of raw number pattern? Numerology might assimilate '2' to opposition, but OPPOSITION = 238 = 13 = 4 (twice 2, and the Numogrammatic twin of ('4' = COMPLETION = 212 =) 5), while even if numerological '3' as CONJUNCTION = 237 = 12 = 3 finds itself qabbalisitically confirmed (at the extremity of its decimaliza-

4 . Employing August Barrow's 'Anglossic Qabbala', the basic tool of which is the Alphanumeric Gematria. This numerization of the Neo-Roman alphabet , continuing the procedure now familiar from Hexadecimal, is a continuous nonredundant system, supplementing the numerals 0-9 with numerized letters from A (=10) to Z (=35), treating the 0-Z alphanumeric sequence as a numeral succession, corresponding to the numerals of a modulus 36 notation.
Thus UNITY = 30+23+18+29+34 = 134. 1+3+4 = 8.

tion), this is not, perhaps, in an altogether comfortable mode.

Numerology may be fascinated by numbers, but its basic orientation is profoundly antinumerical. It seeks essentially to redeem number, through symbolic absolution into a 'higher' significance. As if the concept of 'opposition' represented an elevation above the ('mere') number two, rather than a restriction, subjectivization, logicization and generalized perversion, directed to anthropomorphic use-value and psychological satisfaction. Archetypes are sad limitations of the species, while numbers are an eternal hypercosmic delight.

Nevertheless, qabbalism is right up against numerology, insofar as it arises 'here,' within a specific biological and logocratic environment. The errors of numerology are only the common failures of logic and philosophy, human vanities, crudified in the interest of mass dissemination, but essentially uncorrupted. The numeric-critique (or transcendental arithmetic) of a Gödel (or Turing, or Chaitin (or Badiou?(??(???)))) can be rigorously transferred to this controversy, demonstrating – within each particular milieu – that overcodings of numerical relation by intelligible forms – 'archetypes' or 'logics' – are unsustainable reductions, reefed on the unsurpassable semiotic potency of number. Gödel has shown that there is always a number, in fact an infinitude of (natural) numbers, that simulate, parody, logically dialectize, paradoxically dismantle, archetypally hypervert, and in whatever way necessary subvert each and every overcoding of

arithmetic. Number cannot be superseded. There is no possibility of an authoritative 'philosophy of arithmetic' or numerological gnosis.

Qabbala assumes that semiotics is 'always already' cryptography, that the cryptographic sphere is undelimitable. It proceeds on the assumption that there cannot be an original (unproblematic) coding, providing the basis for any solid definition or archetypal symbol, since the terms required for such a coding are incapable of attaining the pure 'arbitrariness' that would ensure the absence of prior cryptographic investment. There is not – and can never be – any 'plain text,' except as a naïve political assumption about (the relative (non)insidiousness of) coding agencies and the presupposition that communicative signs accessibly exist that are not already 'in code.' Since everything is coded, or (at least) potentially coded, nothing is (definitively) symbolic. Qabbalistic cryptocultures – even those yet to come – ensure that number cannot be discussed or situated without subliminal or (more typically) wholly unconscious participation in numerical practices. Logos, including that of numerology, is also always something other than itself, and in fact very many things.

Qabbalism thus operates as an inverse or complementary Gödelian double-coding. Where Gödel demonstrated that the number line is infested by virtual discursive systems of undelimitable topicality and complexity, pre-emptively dismantling the prospects of any conceivable supranumerical metadiscourse, qabbala

demonstrates that discourses are themselves intrinsically redoubled (and further multiplied) by coincidental numerical systems which enter into patterns of connectivity entirely independent of logical regimentation.

The supposed numerical de-activation of the alphabet, marking semiotic modernity (the era of specialized numerical signs), has an extremely fragile foundation, relying as it does upon the discontinuation of specific cultural procedures (precisely those that withdraw into 'occultism') rather than essential characteristics of signs themselves. The persistent numerical functionalization of the modern alphabet – with sorting procedures based on alphabetical ordering as the most prominent example – provides incontestible evidence (if any was required) that the semiotic substructure of all Oecumenic communications remains stubbornly amphibious between logos and nomos, perpetually agitated by numerical temptations and uncircumscribed polyprocesses.

At the discursive level, any 'rigorization of qabbala' can only be a floating city, with each and every definition, argument and manifesto continually calving off into unmasterable numerical currents and alogical resonances. How could qabbala be counterposed to a code, to meaning and reason, when CODE (= 63) finds duplicitous harmonics in MEANING = REASON = 126? If qabbala positions itself discursively AGAINST NUMEROLOGY (= 369), the echoes of its novanomic signature perpetuate themselves even through such unlikely terms as

SIGNIFICANCE (= 207) and SIGNIFICATION (= 252). Pronouncements that begin as projected logical discriminations revert to variations on triplicity and the number nine, performing a base qabbalistic subversion of philosophical legislation and its authority to define (or delimit connectivity).

No polemic against numerology – whether conducted in the name of qabbala or of Oecumenic common reason – will transcend the magmic qabbalistic flux that multiplies and mutates its sense. Perhaps dreams of numerological archetypes even sharpen the lust for semiotic invention, opening new avenues for qabbalistic incursion. But this at least is certain: Numbers do not require – and will never find – any kind of logical redemption. They are an eternal hypercosmic delight.